

Things I Want My Children to Know Before They Leave Home

(James 2:19; 4:13-14 & Ps 70:10-12)

Grace Church, October 17, 2010

Introduction:

Suppose you were sending one of your children on an extended trip. An expedition, much like the survivor shows that we may see on television. You are responsible for packing their survival kit. What would you put in it? Well, here's the reality and it is not a TV show. You as a parent have been given the responsibility of preparing your teenager, your child to survive in the world that at times can be very hostile towards those who are followers of Jesus Christ. How are you going to prepare them for living out on their own?

Our four children have all left home. Some have recycled, which we count as a blessing. And I would encourage you as parents who are empty-nesters when your children want to come back home for a period of time, welcome them in. Now don't enable bad behavior. But, it could be possible that God is giving you another opportunity to repack the survival kit for your child.

For those teenagers and just beyond teenage years that are still living under the roof or at least under the care of a parent, I want to encourage you. Even exhort you. We as parents really are trying to do the right thing. It is possible that you think we were never teenagers. I promise you every one of us was teenagers at one time. Not a single one of us missed that time in our lives. For some of us it was just as challenging to be a teenager back in the day as it is in today's fast paced technological society. We are not out to make life miserable for you. Regardless of what you think and what some of your peers will tell you.

Do we always get it right? No, no a 1000 times, we do not always get it right. But from a parent's perspective I would say to you we try really hard to get it right but, sometimes we absolutely blow it. Parents, when you blow it, your teenager knows it. The thing to do is to apologize, take a step back and start again.

As a part of this family life emphasis in the month of October, this morning I am asking a question and hope to provide some answers. Here is the question, **"if you could only teach your**

children five things before they leave home to live on their own, what would those five things be"?

Perhaps you are saying right now, just five things? Well, I am sure there are more than five things that we want our children to know. But I have phrased it that way for two reasons. One is to prompt you to think seriously about the things that you are teaching your children, whether consciously or unconsciously you are teaching them. What you want to do is to be very intentional about how you are equipping them to live in this world. The second reason I have narrowed it down to five is, there is not enough time this morning to cover much more than five. So what I want to do is to give you the five that I have selected. You may choose a different five. I suggest to you that these five are extremely important. So, let's begin. I will begin each one with the same phrase and then conclude with a different objective.

Here is the first one.

1. There is a God and his name is Jesus.

There are several things I would like to point out under this first point. First, there is tons of misinformation about who Jesus Christ is. From novels such as the DaVinci Code which presents fiction as if it were truth, to those who are outright hostile to anything that has to do with Christianity.

Secondly, I would want my child to know Jesus Christ on a first name basis. That is they have a personal relationship with him. No, you cannot believe for your child. Yes, you can trust God with your child and pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, God would draw them to himself and give them saving faith to accept Christ as their personal savior.

Knowing Christ personally is not just head knowledge. Unfortunately, within Christian circles, that is too often true. We know a lot about who Jesus is, but as far as having a relationship with him, it's no more than any relationship that we would have with a historical figure of the past.

History has proven that you can send your child to AWANA for six years. They can win every medal possible and still not know Jesus Christ as their personal savior.

- It's not just knowing who died for sins.
- It is not just knowing who was born on Christmas Day and died on Easter.
- It is not just knowing that Jesus walked on water.
- It is not just knowing that Jesus performed miracles of healing.
- It's not just knowing that Jesus resurrected from the dead and was seen by more than 500 people.

As a parent **you cannot lead your child** to a place you are not. In other words if you sit here this morning and in all honesty you have to say to me "Ed I have never placed saving faith in Jesus Christ", then you're going to have a very difficult time leading your child to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

19 You **believe that God** is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (Jas 2:19 ESV)

Some here this morning are only name droppers when it comes to Jesus Christ. Do you know what I mean by being a name dropper? It's claiming to know someone when you really don't know them. A number of years ago I was doing some work in Holmes County Ohio. We had invited Congressman Ralph Regula to come to the meeting and share his testimony as a believer in Christ. A friend of mine, who was working with me, claimed to know Ralph on a first name basis. I suspected this was not quite the truth. On the evening that the Congressman was to come and speak I was waiting near the reserved parking area to meet him and escort him to the platform. I noticed my friend standing nearby. When the Congressman's car arrived my friend made a beeline for his car. As the Congressman stepped out of his automobile I heard my friend say to him, I am... That is possibly how you would meet Jesus if he showed up this morning. Having a fear of being embarrassed that he would not know your name you would try to circumvent embarrassment by beating everyone else to the punch.

Knowing Christ personally is heart presence. It is placing what I call "saving faith" into the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and through his resurrection. Let me explain saving faith to you.

It is experiencing the joy of knowing that you've been presented to God as pure and righteous. It is knowing the joy of having your slate wiped clean. It is knowing that the things in your life which have blocked a relationship with your Creator have been washed as clean as what the Bible refers to as "white as snow".

"ABC"s of knowing Christ

- Admit
- Believe
- Choose

Sometimes I think that we as parents are afraid to question our children too deeply concerning this matter of having a personal relationship with Christ. Perhaps it is out of fear of what they might say. We are afraid they will say no I don't and I don't want to. That would just be too hard for me as a parent to hear so I let them coast along perhaps knowing the right verbiage but not knowing the Savior.

If I had the opportunity to do it over again, I would have extended conversations with my children about who Jesus Christ is and who he wants to be in their lives. That does not mean that I didn't do this, however, I think I would be much more intentional if I had the opportunity to do this with my children. I would not count on what the Sunday school teacher taught them. I would not count on a prayer they prayed during truth and training at AWANA. AWANA is a great program but God has not given to AWANA the responsibility of leading your child to Christ. As a parent it is your responsibility. That is what Deuteronomy chapter 6 talks about. Parents teach your children. Your children are some of the main people within your OIKOS.

7 You shall **teach them diligently** to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Dt 6:7 ESV)

I'm sure that you have discovered just as I have, teachable moments in our children's lives are precious and intermittent. I encourage you to pray for wisdom to know when your child's heart is open and tender. They are receptive and teachable. As I reflect back I remember teachable times in my

children's lives that I allowed the pressures of work and my schedule to squelch those moments. You likely have been in the same place. There are times that I grieve over missing those moments.

Back in July I asked you to present questions concerning the family that you would like to see addressed during this time. One of those questions was: How do I relate to my child, who as an adult, has turned his back on Christianity? In other words what do we do when one of our children whom we have taught the word of God and prayed for simply says "I don't believe that anymore, if it helps you that's great but it's not for me". Or perhaps they don't say it that way but their lifestyle is certainly contrary to what a devoted follower of Jesus Christ would be living. How do you relate to that adult child? How do you **love your prodigal?**

These are tough and hard questions. They are real questions. They are heart rending questions. It is likely there is not a pat answer for every situation. I think it is through much prayer that we seek God for wisdom on what our relationship ought to be.

I would say that if you have a child who has said Christianity is not for me then I would treat the child as an unbeliever. How do we treat unbelievers? God says to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Place them in your oikos circle, these are people that God has intended for you to influence with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's exactly how I would treat them.

If an unbeliever showed up at my door and needed help I would help them. If an unbeliever showed up at my door with his live-in and needed a place to stay overnight I would open our spare room to them. I would simply treat my unbelieving children as I would any other unbeliever in the world. I would do everything in my power to love them and to do good works so they may see those good works and give glory to God.

If an adult child has not turned his/her back on Christ but is living in a lifestyle which is contrary to that of a devoted follower of Christ, this is a different situation. In both situations I have to be very careful not to enable aberrant behavior. For a believing child who's walking in disobedience I want to do my best to share with them how it is that their actions are bringing shame to the name of

Christ. You cannot convict them, so don't even try. But you can pray for the conviction of the Holy Spirit in their lives. That is one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit being in the world is that the Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgment to come.

Let me give you some things that come from Focus on the Family that will help as you reach out to your prodigal. That prodigal could be a son or daughter, grandchild, niece or nephew. They don't even have to be related for you to care for them and desire to reach out.

1. **Don't be too embarrassed to ask for support and prayer.**

When Amber left, I felt like such a failure. But when my husband and I admitted to others what was going on, we found comfort from Christian parents who also had prodigals.

2. **Don't blame yourself.**

When children enter the prodigal world, we tend to think it's because we did something wrong. After all, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." But this Scripture was never meant as a guilt trip, nor as a guarantee.

Sure, we make mistakes, but ultimately kids make their own choices. Young people leave family and faith because they decide to.

3. **Know the difference between helping and enabling.**

4. **Don't forget the rest of your family.**

Sometimes we have to entrust our prodigals to the Lord — and let Him work while we continue with the rest of life.

5. **Realize your parenting has changed.**

"Even if your daughter comes home tomorrow, it will be different," a co-worker told me. "She has emotionally removed herself from your authority. Now you learn how to parent an adult child."

When a child leaves a parent's care and protection, the relationship changes forever. We can let our prodigals know we love them, but we have to let go of our responsibility for them.

6. **Build a unified front with your spouse.**

After Tami left home and got into financial difficulties, her parents decided together how they would field the requests for money they knew would come. They agreed to tell Tami, "I'll talk to your mom/dad about it, and we'll let you know."

Also, don't forget to work on your marriage relationship. Make sure you don't spend all your time together talking about the prodigal.

7. **Set boundaries.**

During a prodigal season, otherwise lovable kids are often at their worst. They may become rude, demanding, manipulative and abusive. Some parents think they have to put up with bad behavior in order to display God's love. That's not so. The prodigal benefits more from the parent who says, "I love you, but I won't tolerate disrespect."

Set boundaries in any area that concerns you, especially if your child wants to move back. Make sure your child understands your boundaries and the consequences for overstepping them.

8. **Deal with your feelings.**

Parents of rebellious kids face many emotions: anger (at the child, at themselves, at a mate, at a child's bad companions), grief, sorrow, depression and guilt. Whatever the feelings, we have to acknowledge them before we can deal with them.

9. **Remember God loves your child more than you do.**

Parents of prodigals feel helpless. That's why we must lean on God and His grace. He constantly draws them to himself and will be with them even when we can't.

10. **Look to a brighter future.**

In talking with dozens of parents, I learned that the prodigal season is just that, a season. Amber outgrew her prodigal stage within a couple of years as she realized she didn't like being a "wild child." Sooner or later, most children return to good relationships with their parents and their heavenly Father.

(adapted from "Loving Your Prodigal" by Jeanette Gardner Littleton/
family.org)

Form a prayer support group. If you are interested in getting together with others for periods of prayer please let me know.

2. There is a God and life on terra firma is very short.

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (Jas 4:13-15 ESV)

10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. 11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? 12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. (Ps 90:10-12 ESV)

I realize this morning that if you're 10 years old, someone who is 70 is really ancient. I realize that if you're a teenager when I say life is short you have not yet come to the recognition of your own mortality. That is simply a part of being young. I was young then too. It was around the age of 43 that I began to understand that life as we live and breathe in this world is indeed brief.

However there are times when some of us die young. Case in point is 13 year old Donnie Hampton who died in May as a result of rough "horseplay" at Kingsley Jr. High. I do not say this to scare anyone but to try and impress you that life is much shorter than we can imagine. You need to understand I am speaking about life on this side of eternity. We all live on into eternity however, only those who have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ spend eternity in the new heaven and earth God has planned for a future time.

What is it that I'm trying to say? I want my children to understand how precious life is. Every moment is to be counted as a gift from God. After all, God is the giver and sustainer of life.

And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years. ~Abraham Lincoln

Without a doubt our lives are busier than they have ever been before. And I question, busy with what? What is it that makes us so busy? Are we producing more? I don't think so. I think we are busier doing different things. Life has become a smorgasbord at which I am like a starving man standing before a spread of delicacies. And if he is not careful he will overload his plate. And then get another plate and overload it. In the end he eats way more than he should and suffers the consequences.

Parents, I encourage you not to succumb to the pressures of our culture which say that your child's health and self-esteem are dependent upon his or her ability to be involved in extracurricular activities or sports programs. Your child's self-worth and self-esteem is not established on the soccer field. It is established in your home. It is the value that you place on your child's life and the relationship that you have with them that will mold their image of themselves. Success on the baseball diamond does not translate into success in life. I challenge you to do a study on those who have made it to the major leagues, regardless of which sport it is, their success in that sport did not determine their success in being a good parent, a good child or a good member society. All you have to do is look at all the drug failures and the wipeouts, washouts and the time spent in prison by those involved in professional athletics.

As I was preparing for this morning at this particular point I stopped and prayed for you, I prayed "God help hearts of parents to be teachable especially at this particular time."

As a friend, and one of your pastors, I exhort you, I encourage you, if necessary I beg you this morning to evaluate how busy you have allowed your child to become and how you have allowed the pressures of the society to involve your children in things that send the wrong message.

Let me explain. Some have their children involved in sports leagues to play sports on Sunday. Now stop right there do not label me as a legalist. I am not. Let me ask a question, why is it that we are dismayed at the numbers of our young people who upon graduation from high school walk away from their faith or the faith of their fathers? I think part of the issue is the message that we are sending to them. Our actions speak louder than our words.

We as Christians say that one of the most important things we do as believers is our time of worship together. It just so happens that here at Grace Church we have designated Sunday mornings as a time for fellowship and worship of our Lord as a group of believers. When volleyball, soccer or baseball replace that priority, you have just sent to your children a message that your self-esteem which is built in playing sports is much more valuable than our corporate family time of worshiping God together. Now the day of the week we choose to do that is not the point here. We could just as easily meet on Friday. If you all wanted to say Friday is our day of worship then we would have worship on Friday. But that's not what we've chosen to do. We have said Sunday is the day we have set aside to be obedient to God's direction of meeting together for the purpose of edification, fellowship, exhortation and worship in the Word.

Lea and I decided early on that the involvement of our children in sports would not interfere with their lives as Christians. Rather their involvement in sports was an opportunity for us to influence our oikos. We told the coaches right up front that if games were scheduled for Sunday our children would not be present. We never found a coach who was not accepting of that and if we had we simply would not have played. Our children were never ostracized because of it and all four of them have a good sense of who they are and their abilities in life. In other words missing sports games was not detrimental to their mental or physical well-being.

Dr James Dobson writes in his book The New Hide or Seek about the self-image we build in our children.

John McKay, the great football coach of the University of Southern California and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, was being interviewed on television when the subject of his son's athletic talent was raised. That year John McKay Jr. was a successful player on his dad's college team. Coach McKay was asked to comment on the pride he must feel over his son's accomplishments on the field. His answer was most impressive: "Yes, I'm pleased that John had a good season last year. He does a fine job and I am proud of him. But I would be just as proud if he had never played the game at all."

Coach McKay was saying, in effect, that John's football talent is recognized and appreciated, but his human worth does not depend on his ability to play football. Thus, his son would not lose respect if the next season brought failure and disappointment. John's place in his dad's heart was secure, independent of his performance. I wish every child could say the same.

Things that may damage self concept

- Excessive criticism
- Overprotection or overindulgence
- Neglect
- Comparing to others
- Allowing teens to be disrespectful
- Perfectionism (conditional love)

The ABC's of building good self-esteem.

(Adapted from BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN YOUR KIDS/ Family.org)

- **Acceptance**

Listen and ask questions to show you care about his/her interests and concerns. The result is a good relationship with your child.

- **Belonging**

Everyone regardless of age wants to belong. Nobody sets out to be a loner or an outsider. We give our children a sense of belonging by creating a community within our family. A place where they are valued for who they are. A place where their opinion is sought and allowed to be expressed.

- **Competence**

As parents we tend to error at two extremes. One is overprotection. We hover over our child's every action as if something is waiting to bring disaster at any moment. We are always giving instruction or doing it for them. This sends a message they are incompetent.

The other extreme is no supervision at all. They are on their own. In this methodology the parent stops being the parent and acquiesces to the every whim of the child.

It is a delicate balance between too much and not enough. Most of us learn by doing and through making mistakes. Far too often we as parents take our child's failure as failure on our part to be a good parent. Likewise we live vicariously through their successes.

We need to adopt the parenting approach of a mother eagle. Every parent eagle wants their little bird to fly. And more than just fly, they want them to soar on powerful wings. When the eaglet is about 80% his adult

size the mother places him on the edge of the nest and then pushes him out of the nest. She then watches her baby freefall. At the last moment she swoops down and catches her baby on her wings. This process is repeated over and over until, on its own, her baby begins to fly.

Our children's self-image is built by our careful attention, protection and pushing them a bit beyond their ability. Yes they will make mistakes but that is ok.

So What?

We all know, if you don't you will in just a moment, the best teacher is that of a good example. The old adage "your actions speak so loud I cannot hear what you are saying" is very true. One that our young people could be saying to us. I have not met too many parents who did not desire to be better parents. Yes, some were so narcissistic they could not see beyond themselves, however most of us want to be good parents that rear well grounded children.

Before you run home today with a new and improved plan to change your children I challenge you to first set out on a course to change yourself. As I am coaching couples who are challenged in their relationships with each other, the one constant advice is "you cannot change your spouse so don't waste anymore time trying." What you can change is yourself. How you react or respond to other people and the situation you find yourself in is entirely up to you.

Let me challenge the children here this morning. I speak to you even if you are an adult. How you relate to your parents has a great impact on how good life can be. No matter how much you want to, you cannot change your parents. You can only change your behavior. Let me give you a few words of exhortation from the Word of God.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Col 3:20-21 ESV)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you

may live long in the land." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:1-4 ESV)

O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer. This is my constant longing and prayer; gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! full of compassion, loving, forgiving, tender and kind; helping the helpless, cheering the fainting, seeking the wand'ring sinner to find.

O to be like Thee lowly in spirit, holy and harmless, patient and brave; meekly enduring cruel reproaches, willing to suffer others to save.

O to be like Thee! while I am pleading, pour out Thy Spirit, fill with Thy love; make me a temple meet for Thy dwelling; fit me for life and heaven above.

Chorus: O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art! Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness; stamp Thine own image deep on my heart¹

¹ Osbeck, K. W. (1990). *Amazing grace : 366 inspiring hymn stories for daily devotions* (255). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications.